

## Essay Expectations, Reminders and Common Errors

### Introductory Paragraph: (hook, transition, blueprint, thesis)

1. **Hook or Attention Grabber:** This part of the introduction needs to introduce the reader to the **topic** of your essay. It also needs to be engaging enough to make the reader want to read on. A solid hook can be written in **three to five** sentences. The literature is **NOT** mentioned in the hook. Just introduce the **idea** that you will be writing about. Relate the topic of your essay to **real life**.

#### Avoid:

- using the phrase: "In today's society." What does it *really* mean?
- using a quotation without adding some sentences to connect it to the idea of your essay
- using a quotation without citing it
- a one--sentence hook; you cannot introduce an idea in a single sentence
- single--word sentences - they are too informal for an academic essay
- definitions - this is too mechanical and is lazy writing
- asking a question, unless you develop the idea in subsequent sentences
- asking a question that is not likely to be true: *Have you ever lived in a dystopian society and were treated violently every day?*
- using *absolutes* like "always" and "never" since they are rarely accurate or true

2. **Transition:** In this section, let your reader know that the author of the text demonstrates or examines the topic, from your hook, in his/her literature. Identify the **title** of the piece and **who wrote it**.

ex. Orwell examines this idea of \_\_\_\_\_ in his novel *1984*.

3. **Blueprint:** This is the place where you foreshadow the **two (or more) main points** you will use in your argument. Think of it as **hinting** at what you will eventually prove. Use **one sentence each** to introduce the points - that's two sentences in total! Give enough of a hint that the reader knows how you will develop that point. Write these **in the order that you will argue them** in the middle paragraphs of your essay.

#### Avoid:

- putting both points in one sentence - this does not give you enough space to offer a clear indication of what you will argue in each middle paragraph
- choppy sentences - use transitions between each idea
- being too basic - these sentences need to sound like the arguments you will use to introduce each middle paragraph; tell the reader enough so that s/he knows what to expect in the rest of the essay

4. **Thesis:** This sentence (just one) should function as a **summary** of what you want to prove. It needs to be **arguable, provable and worth proving**. That means it answers the "**So what?**" question. Talk specifically about the characters and the literature. Argue something insightful and original!!

#### Avoid:

- asking a question
- talking about people in general
- stating a fact
- being obvious - show the reader a new/insightful way to look at the text or a character
- being too wordy - this needs to be the clearest sentence in the essay

**Body Paragraphs:** (topic sentence, point, proof, quotation, explanation, point, proof, quotation, explanation, conclusion)

1. **Topic Sentence:** Begin with a **statement of argument**. Tell readers, in one sentence, what you want to **argue** in this paragraph. Connect it directly to the **thesis**. Explain **HOW** this paragraph will help you to prove the thesis.

**Avoid:**

- stating a fact - you need something you can argue
- describing a character, telling what happens in the story or giving background details
- a long opening - get to the point of this paragraph right away in one sentence
- using personal pronouns (I, we, us, you)

2. **Point:** this is the first **general reason** or **way** that you are going to prove your topic sentence and your thesis. Essentially, it is your first argument. Begin with a transition. eg. Initially...

**Avoid:**

- skipping this part and going straight to the example - this part establishes the first (and then second) way(s) that this paragraph will prove the thesis.

3. **Proof:** Provide a **specific example** that proves your point. **In your own words**, introduce the **example** from the text to prove the point you want to make. Provide enough **context** so the reader knows which scene you are using, which character is involved and which character is speaking. Begin with a transition. eg. Specifically...

**Avoid:**

- skipping this part and going straight to the quotation - your reader needs the context or background details to know which part of the text you are referring to

4. **Quotation:** The quotation should **directly relate** to the proof. Only use as much of the quotation as you need to illustrate your point. Provide a lead-in to introduce the speaker and to blend the quotation smoothly with the rest of your writing. Include the author's **name** and **page** number at the end of the quotation.

**Avoid:**

- "floating the quotation" - you must state who is speaking and what is happening before you add the quotation; blend the quotation in smoothly
- using incorrect punctuation: 1. Use a comma to separate the lead-in from the quotation if one is a complete sentence and one is a partial sentence. 2. Use a period if both are complete sentences. 3. If you are blending the two together to make them sound like one sentence, you need no punctuation between them.
- not citing the quotation
- improper punctuation - question and exclamation marks go **AFTER** the citation (Orwell 3)!

5. **Explanation:** In this section, explain **how** or **why** (or both) the proof and quotation you offer **prove** your point for the whole paragraph. Explain **why** it is there, what it **means** and/or its **significance**. **Teach** the reader something.

**Avoid:**

- restating what happens in the quotation
- writing the explanation without ever discussing the example and quotation you have provided.
- talking about people in general - talk about the characters!
- not connecting the explanation to both the **point** and your **thesis** - **this is key!** (more on next page)

- saying that a quotation can prove something; it cannot. That is your job as the author of the essay.  
**Instead you could say:** In this example, the character demonstrates that...

\***NOTE:** When moving on to your **SECOND** point, proof, quotation and explanation in a paragraph, use a **transition** to let the reader know that you are finished explaining one example and are ready to offer a second example to prove your argument. You need to **cue the reader** about what you are doing.

6. **Conclusion:** Remind readers of your main idea in this paragraph as well as the two ways you proved it. Be specific. Use a transition word. eg. Evidently...

**Avoid:**

- using the same words you used to begin the paragraph
- asking a question
- talking about people in general - focus on the characters and what you argued about them

**Concluding Paragraph:** (warm down, three points, final thoughts)

1. **Warm Down Sentence:** In this sentence, remind the reader of what you have argued in your essay (thesis). Talk about the literature and characters. Use different language than you used in your thesis. One sentence is all you need here.

**Avoid:**

- using the same words you used in your thesis
- talking about people in general - talk about the characters and **specifically** remind the reader what you proved in the essay
- more than one sentence here - be succinct and clear

2. **Reminder of Two or Three Points:** Remind the reader of the main ideas that you argued in the essay. You may use two sentences - one for each main point **OR** you may put both points into one sentence. Again, these points should **reflect the order of their appearance in the middle paragraphs of your essay**.

**Avoid:**

- leaving this part out
- being too brief - remind the reader how you proved each of your two (or more) points

3. **Final Thoughts:** This is the part of the writing where you leave readers with something insightful to think about. Make a connection between the topic of your essay and people in the real world. **Consider:** What can readers learn from this piece of literature? Why was it important for you to examine THIS particular topic about THIS particular piece of literature? Consider connecting your final thoughts back to your hook. Two to three sentences should be sufficient. You may use personal pronouns here (I, you, we).

**Avoid:**

- asking a question - that is too simple; share an idea with the reader
- talking about the novel - this is where you want to step out of the literature and talk about the topic and what readers can learn from the novel and the topic
- ending with a quotation if you do not connect it to your own ideas; "Don't float the quote!"
- adding a new idea that you have not mentioned yet in your essay

## General Essay Reminders:

**Diction:** Always use formal, academic diction. Avoid slang, cliches and contractions.

**Transitions:** Use transitions between paragraphs and between ideas within paragraphs. They help to ease the reader smoothly from one idea to the next. Use a variety of transitions and stay away from: first, second, next OR to begin...

**Titles of Literature:** Put short story titles into quotation marks (e.g. "Harrison Bergeron"). This is the general rule for anything that is part of a larger whole (story titles, article titles, poem titles, song titles). Novel titles and plays that stand alone are italicized (e.g. *1984* or *Hamlet*).

**Titles of your Essay:** Dream up a creative title – 1984 is not acceptable since George Orwell wrote it, not you. "Essay" is also not acceptable.

**Point of View:** Do not use the first person "I" or "I think." In a formal essay your argument should be made from an objective point of view. It is understood that the opinions expressed are those of the writer.

**Tense:** Present tense is preferable to past tense. However, you must use the tense you have chosen consistently throughout your essay.

**Audience:** Assume an academic audience. Do not use slang or abbreviations. Also, assume the reader of your essay has read the work you are discussing. This means that you can refer briefly to the story without going into all the preceding or following details. Do not summarize the plot!

**Proofread:** Eliminate spelling and grammar errors as these distract the reader from your ideas and can be annoying.

**Numbers:** For numbers greater than ten, you may use numerals (678 or 43). For numbers ten or below, type out the word (six, eight).

**Typing:** Please type your final copy. Computer-produced essays should have a 12 point Times New Roman font and adequate margins.

**MLA Formatting:** Include your name, your teacher's name, the course code and the date on the first page of the essay. Paginate the essay in the top right corners. Use your last name followed by a space and the page number.

**Computer Problems:** Save, save, save. Save to a memory stick. Save to a hard drive. E-mail a copy to your dad. Produce a hard copy. Computer problems happen from time to time. They do not buy you extensions; they make your essay late.

**Works Cited Page:** The final page of your essay should be your Works Cited page. Alphabetize your sources by the author's last name. Double space the entries. Indent the second and all subsequent lines of each entry. Number this page as the last page of your essay. Example:

Galasso 7

### Works Cited

Alberta. Alberta Foundation for the Arts. *Apply Yourself*. 2002. Web. 16 Sept. 2009.

Shakespeare, William. *King Lear*. Ed. Harold Bloom. Vol. Ed. Neil Heims. New York: Bloom's, 2008. Print.